



War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year Old

Key Question: Can we rely on the memory of a soldier who was 14-yrs-old during the Siege of Fort Brown to provide an accurate account of the Siege?

Relevance to Student Knowledge: Most students have thought about living without their parents.

Student Learning Objectives: Students will learn about the siege of Fort Brown, identify the frame of reference that influenced a participant in the Siege, and learn how point-of-view affects text.

TEKS

History: 7.4 (A,B) Individuals and events during the Mexican War

Social Studies Skills: 7.22 (A) Use primary sources, such as interviews

Social Studies Skills: 7.21 (E) Identify frame of reference that influenced participants in an event

Language Arts: 7.10(F) Determine a text's main ideas and details

Language Arts: 7.10(H) Draw inferences and support them with text evidence and experience

Language Arts: 7.12(H) Describe how point-of-view affects the text

Trunk Materials

- Full Interview **Campaigning Through Mexico**
- Student Interview **Campaigning Through Mexico**
- Master student worksheet **War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year-Old**
- Master student worksheet **Timeline - U.S.-Mexican War**
- Teacher background information on U.S.-Mexican War and Battle of Palo Alto
- Full Interview **Campaigning Through Mexico** (available on request)

Teacher-Supplied Materials

- Copies of interview (either full or student version)
- Copies of student worksheet **War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year-Old**
- Copies of student worksheet **Timeline - U.S.-Mexican War**
- Butcher paper
- Dictionaries

BACKGROUND: The site unofficially referred to as Fort Texas was a fieldwork, taking the rough shape of a six-sided star. Each packed-earth face of the fort extended from 125 to 150 yards. The walls were 9 feet in height, and 15 feet wide, with a moat, 20 feet wide and 8 feet deep circling the exterior. Inside, U.S. troops constructed a number of bomb-proofs and powder magazines to provide shelter from any incoming fire.

Mexican General Arista began positioning artillery and troops around the fort shortly after General Taylor departed on May 1, 1846. And, at 5 a.m. on May 3, 1846, Mexican forces opened fire on the fort from guns placed directly across the Rio Grande. Troops of the U.S. 7th Infantry quickly responded with their own artillery. When additional cannon fire erupted from Mexican positions up and down the river's bank, fort commander Jacob Brown pointed his guns into the city of Matamoros. Fire continued on both sides until well into the night.

In time, this artillery exchange gave way to a prolonged standoff. Despite the steady Mexican fire of May 3, the fort's earthen walls withstood the impacts well. Mexican leaders apparently acknowledged the lack of success and, in the ensuing days, firing on the fort diminished considerably. Apparently believing that a charge on the fort would produce heavy casualties in his ranks, Mexican General Pedro de Ampudia settled in for a more traditional siege in the hope that General Arista's army could prevent assistance from reaching the fort.

The cannonade from within the fort declined as well. Realizing that the shots directed on Matamoros were having minimal effect, Major Brown called for a halt to firing. Over the next several days, the U.S. troops conserved their limited ammunition, offered only brief flurries of return fire, and concentrated on shoring up the defenses of their post. Otherwise, the soldiers could do little but wait for General Taylor to march to the rescue.

When that advance finally came, Mexican troops received orders to assist in efforts to halt the U.S. Army. Although artillery continued a sporadic fire upon the fort, much of the Mexican infantry and cavalry surrounding the post moved forward to join the fighting at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma.

The U.S. soldiers in Ft. Texas first learned of the advance from the distant rumble of cannon fire at Palo Alto on May 8. Additional sounds of battle revealed that fighting had reached Resaca de la Palma on May 9. That afternoon, the sight of hundreds of Mexican soldiers rushing to cross the Rio Grande indicated that Taylor's troops had been victorious.

The U.S. victory at Resaca de la Palma brought an end to the six-day bombardment of Ft. Texas. Apparently concerned that the fire might strike their own retreating forces, Mexican

MANAGEMENT

1. Preview the activity.

Vocabulary – See Guided Lesson.

gunners immediately halted their cannonade. U.S. soldiers briefly fired on the retreating Mexican troops, but they halted when it appeared they might strike their own compatriots, who followed in close pursuit.

Though the confrontation at Fort Texas lasted six days, with periods of heavy cannon fire, casualties were remarkably low. Only two U.S. soldiers died in the bombardment, but that toll included the fort commander Jacob Brown. Major Brown was struck in the leg by a cannon ball on May 6. He survived for several days only to die on May 9, just hours before the siege ended. Despite his wound, Brown had helped maintain troop morale throughout the siege and his men named the liberated post—Fort Brown—in his honor.

Mexican leaders reported two killed and two wounded from U.S. artillery fire during the siege. The effect of artillery fire on the civilian population of Matamoros is unknown.

The Fort Today

Fort Brown has suffered the consequences of natural and manmade activity in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Although Fort Brown remained an active post until after World War II, the original earthworks were abandoned shortly after the war with Mexico. After a century of gradual erosion, the fort took a direct hit in the 1950s, when much of the structure was bulldozed to build a levee along the Rio Grande. Today a small section of the original ramparts has survived in the midst of the Fort Brown Golf Course.

In recent years, a growing preservation effort has emerged to preserve the remains of Fort Brown. Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site is currently involved in activities to stabilize the surviving earthworks, to protect the site, and to interpret this fort as a unit of the park.

LESSON

Introduction

1. Tell students to close their eyes.
2. Ask students the following questions:
 - Are you independent?
 - Do you rely on your parents or do you think you can get along without them?
 - Do you think you are ready to live on your own?
 - Add your own questions.

Guided Lesson

4. Tell students: Today we're going to read about Robert Pruyn. Robert Pruyn grew up in New York City. When he was only 12 years-old his parents enlisted him in the U.S military. Pruyn became a drummer boy. During the U.S.-Mexican War he was in the 7th Infantry, which was under General Zachary Taylor. The 7th Infantry defended Fort Brown during a six-day cannon siege.
5. Tell students: Robert Pruyn survived the siege of Fort Brown. Sixty-seven years later, he was interviewed about his experience.
6. The vocabulary words are on the excerpt of the interview. If your students read the entire interview, you may want to, as a **pre-read**, define a couple of terms your students might be unfamiliar with and/or clarify words with multiple meanings. **Options** include:
 - Place these words on a wall or butcher paper to create a "Word Wall", which allows the student to have each word at close distance for future reference/use.
 - As a class, create a picture or visual for each word.
 - Present the word and ask the students to help define it
 - Have students to look up the word in a dictionary. Remind them the meanings should relate to the time and subject.

Discovery

1. Hand out the interview **Campaigning Through Mexico** and worksheets **War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year-Old** and **Timeline of the U.S.-Mexican War**.
2. Have students complete the worksheet. (**Options:** Complete the worksheet as a class or allow students to work in small groups.)

Wrap- up Activities

1. Have students share their answers to the worksheet questions.
2. Have a class discussion based on the key question: Can we rely on the memory of a soldier who was only 12-years-old during the Siege of Fort Brown to provide an accurate account of the Siege?

Extensions:

1. Write a paragraph comparing how you would have reacted during the siege to how Pruyn reacted. Include the following:
 - Would you be as independent?
 - Would you miss home, your parents, your friends?
 - Would you have realized the danger?
2. Write a journal entry as if you were at Fort Brown during the siege.

Student Evaluation/Assessment: Use the student worksheet and class participation as evaluation tools.



Campaigning Through Mexico with Old Rough & Ready

A CONFEDERATE VETERAN'S RECOLLECTIONS OF CAMPAIGNING THROUGH MEXICO WITH 'OLD ROUGH AND READY'

By Robert N. Pruyn (As Told in 1913 to James E. Edmonds)

Printed in Civil War Times Illustrated, October, 1963, pp. 10-15

Though it's been a long, long time since that day I ran away from Harlem [**Note:** Even though Pruyn said he ran away, other documents show that Pruyn's parents signed him up for the Army], it's as clear as yesterday-except that trip down to Port Isabel.

I remember the crowded deck of the boat, with the recruits seasick and miserable. The stewards looked after five of us lads going out to be drummers or in the **fife** corps. Finally we sighted Texas and late one night dropped anchor off Port Isabel.

[At Port Isabel] I remember soldiers guarding great piles of supplies and ox wagons with **provisions** and ammunition. We boys stood about in wide-eyed wonder, watching it all and getting in the way of everyone. It was all so new to use it was like play.

I remember General Zachary Taylor, a plain old man with a loose, unbuttoned blue coat, a check shirt and black tie, broad-brimmed **planter's black felt hat**, boots that slipped down around his calves, and **trousers** that were never quite stuffed in.

Our officers were young fellows just out of West Point. They wore tight-fitting uniforms, always buttoned up no matter how hot it was.

We didn't have much to do. The men **drilled** and drilled until all the **recruits** were ready to march with the veterans.

After supper we boys would sit around campfires and listen to tales of wars and battles.

A week or so after I got to Texas, the regiment marched out to the Rio Grande, about 25 miles away. I don't remember much about the march, except the night camps we made twice and sleeping on the ground, cuddled up with my drum.

We came into sight of Matamoros early in April and went into camp. Soon after that the Mexicans **ambushed** Captain Thornton and his company of **dragoons**.

Our old soldiers were looking glum and mad and were raging because General Taylor wouldn't order an attack. And then it was said that General Taylor was ordered not to do anything except stay on the defensive.

Finally a **courier** brought news that war was formally declared. Two days afterward scouts told us that Mexicans were crossing the river and were about to cut off our line back to Port Isabel.

Our force was divided. [On May 1] My regiment was left at Fort Brown and the rest of the army marched away for [Port Isabel]. Two days afterward, at dawn, the Mexican **batteries** across the river began to **bombard** us. The fort was only earthworks and there was hardly any shelter.

Scouts told us that Mexicans had crossed the river and cut us off from Taylor's army. But we boys never dreamed of being afraid. It was still a great **lark** for us, full of novelty and excitement. Now I know what desperate chances General Taylor was forced to take, and what a dangerous **plight** we were in.

All day, all night the Mexican [cannon] bombarded us. We replied a little, but for the most part kept shelter under the earthworks and let them waste their ammunition.

We didn't know where General Taylor was. We didn't know what was happening. All we did know was that we were left to hold the fort.

Poor Major Brown. A shell wounded him fatally the next day and he died while we were listening to the guns of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. He was buried inside the walls before General Taylor came into view.

That night the dead were arranged for burial outside the fort and the wounded brought inside for care. All night long our surgeons worked by lantern light, and we boys carried bandages and medicines. It was rough work. There were no anesthetics. Legs and arms were cut off while men writhed and groaned and screamed with pain. Outside the carpenter's hammer rang all night building coffins for the dead.

The horror of it burned deep into my brain, but the idea of it ever being me that would get hit never occurred.

Vocabulary

- Fife: A small musical instrument, looks like a flute
- Provisions: A stock of materials or supplies
- Planter's Hat: A hat with a wide brim
- Trousers: Pants
- Drill: To instruct or train by repetition
- Recruit: A newly enlisted or drafted member of the armed forces
- Ambush: To hide in a trap and attack by surprise
- Dragoons: Soldiers who fought on horseback and on foot
- Courier: Messenger
- Batteries: Two or more cannon that are controlled as a unit
- Bombard: To attack forcefully or continuously, especially with cannonballs
- Lark: Something done just for fun or adventure
- Plight: A usually bad condition or state

TIMELINE OF THE U.S.-MEXICAN WAR

Bold Words are vocabulary words.

DATE	EVENTS
December 29, 1845	Texas is annexed to the United States. It is the 28th state.
January 2, 1846	General Mariano Paredes becomes the new Mexican President.
March 8, 1846	The U.S. Army, lead by General Zachary Taylor, leaves Corpus Christi and marches to the Rio Grande.
March 21, 1846	President Paredes announces that he will defend Mexico against the U.S. invasion of Texas.
March 28, 1846	The U.S. Army arrives on the Rio Grande opposite the Mexican city of Matamoros. They start to build Fort Texas.
April 24, 1846	General Mariano Arista arrives in Matamoros, takes command of the Mexican Army, and orders soldiers to cross the Rio Grande.
April 25, 1846	Skirmish at Rancho Carricitos
April 30, 1846	Mexican Army starts crossing the Rio Grande to attack Fort Texas.
May 1, 1846	General Taylor and 3,200 soldiers march to Point Isabel.
May 2, 1846	General Taylor arrives in Point Isabel and secures his supplies.
May 3, 1846	Mexican troops bombard Fort Texas with cannonballs.
May 7, 1846	General Taylor marches from Point Isabel to rescue and bring supplies to Fort Texas.
May 8, 1846	Battle of Palo Alto
May 9, 1846	Battle of Resaca de la Palma President Polk hears about the skirmish at Rancho Carricitos.
May 11, 1846	President Polk asks Congress to declare war on Mexico.
May 13, 1846	The U.S. Congress declares war on Mexico.
May 18, 1846	U.S. troops occupy the town of Matamoros.
September 20-24, 1846	Battle of Monterrey
February 22-23, 1847	Battle of Buena Vista

March 9-27, 1847	Siege of Vera Cruz
September 13, 1847	Battle of Chapultepec
September 14, 1847	U.S. troops occupy Mexico City.
February 2, 1848	The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is signed.

Vocabulary

- Annex: To add territory to one's own territory to form a larger country
- Bombard: To attack forcefully or continuously, especially with cannon
- Occupy: To take or hold possession of; To live in as owner or tenant
- Secure: To make safe
- Skirmish: A minor fight between small groups of soldiers
- Treaty: An agreement made by negotiation; *especially* between two or more rulers



War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year-Old Name: _____

1. Compare/contrast the way General Taylor and the officers dressed. What does his style of clothes tell you about Zachary Taylor, a future U.S. President?

2. “We boys stood about in a wide-eyed wonder. It was all so new to us it was like play.” How does Pruyn’s point-of-view affect his understanding of what was happening?

3. Fill in the table below. (Estimate if you cannot determine the exact date.)

EVENT	DATE ACCORDING TO PRUYN	DATE ON TIMELINE
Formal U.S. Declaration of War		
U.S. Army Marches to Point Isabel		
Mexican Army Bombards Fort Brown		
Battles of Palo Alto & Resaca de la Palma		

Can we rely on the memory of a soldier who was only 14-years-old during the Siege of Fort Brown to provide an accurate account of the Siege?

4. Think about being a 14-year-old experiencing all this. Would you feel homesick? Why or why not?



War Through the Eyes of a 14-Year-Old Name: _____

5. Compare/contrast the way General Taylor and the officers dressed. What does his style of clothes tell you about Zachary Taylor, a future U.S. President?

Officer wore tight-fitting uniforms that were always buttoned while General Taylor wore plain clothes - loose, unbuttoned blue coat, check shirt, black tie, broad-brimmed planter's black felt hat, boots that slipped down around his calves, trousers that were never quite stuffed in. His clothes showed that he dressed plainly and that he was a "man of the people."

6. "We boys stood about in a wide-eyed wonder. It was all so new to us it was like play." How does Pruyn's point-of-view affect his understanding of what was happening?

He was a child and did not understand the dangers of what was happening.

7. Fill in the table below. (Estimate if you cannot determine the exact date.)

EVENT	DATE ACCORDING TO PRUYN	DATE ON TIMELINE
Formal U.S. Declaration of War	<u>Between April & May</u>	<u>May 13, 1846</u>
U.S. Army Marches to Point Isabel	<u>May 1</u>	<u>May 1, 1846</u>
Mexican Army Bombards Fort Brown	<u>May 3</u>	<u>May 3, 1846</u>
Battles of Palo Alto & Resaca de la Palma	<u>On the same day</u>	<u>May 8 & 9, 1846</u>

Can we rely on the memory of a soldier who was only 14-years-old during the Siege of Fort Brown to provide an accurate account of the Siege?

No. Answers will vary. Should include examples of dates on the timeline compared to Pruyn's dates.

8. Think about being a 14-year-old experiencing all this. Would you feel homesick? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.